

Interpreters as Historians in China

Rachel Lung et Donghui Li

Volume 50, numéro 3, août 2005

Le prisme de l'histoire
The History Lens

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/011610ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/011610ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (imprimé)
1492-1421 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Lung, R. & Li, D. (2005). Interpreters as Historians in China. *Meta*, 50(3), 997–1009. <https://doi.org/10.7202/011610ar>

Résumé de l'article

À la suite des efforts réalisés par les chercheurs occidentaux en histoire de l'interprétation, les chercheurs chinois commencent à s'intéresser à ce sujet. La Chine ayant toujours accordé une grande importance aux archives, les ressources historiques nécessaires à une telle recherche ne manquent pas. Il est intéressant d'observer que certaines données historiques liées à l'interprétation laissent apparaître une tendance linguistique régulière : la compilation de dialogues échangés entre envoyés chinois et étrangers.

D'après Li Nanqiu (2002), les interventions des interprètes ont été retranscrites pour faire partie des archives historiques. S'appuyant sur des exemples extraits d'archives primaires, cet article analyse les discours d'événements interprétés, et montre le rôle des interprètes en tant qu'historiens, ou consultants, dans la compilation d'archives historiques dès les débuts de l'histoire diplomatique en Chine.

Interpreters as Historians in China*

RACHEL LUNG

*Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong
wclung@ln.edu.hk*

DONGHUI LI

*Lingnan University, Tuen Mun, Hong Kong
dhuili@ln.edu.hk*

RÉSUMÉ

À la suite des efforts réalisés par les chercheurs occidentaux en histoire de l'interprétation, les chercheurs chinois commencent à s'intéresser à ce sujet. La Chine ayant toujours accordé une grande importance aux archives, les ressources historiques nécessaires à une telle recherche ne manquent pas. Il est intéressant d'observer que certaines données historiques liées à l'interprétation laissent apparaître une tendance linguistique régulière : la compilation de dialogues échangés entre envoyés chinois et étrangers.

D'après Li Nanqiu (2002), les interventions des interprètes ont été retranscrites pour faire partie des archives historiques. S'appuyant sur des exemples extraits d'archives primaires, cet article analyse les discours d'événements interprétés, et montre le rôle des interprètes en tant qu'historiens, ou consultants, dans la compilation d'archives historiques dès les débuts de l'histoire diplomatique en Chine.

ABSTRACT

Subsequent to the western effort in researching the history of interpreting, Chinese scholars have also shown initial interest in the subject. Since China has always valued the recording of history, it seems that historical resources would offer the data required for such an investigation. Interestingly, some historical data relating to interpreting events seem to display a regular linguistic device: the use of dialogues to document exchanges between Chinese and foreign envoys. According to Li Nanqiu (2002), this observation suggests that interpreters' words were put down in writing as part of historical records. Such a claim, however, is not entirely conclusive. Based on examples drawn from primary historical records, this article analyzes discourse features of historical records of interpreting events, and shows the possible role of interpreters as historians, or consultants, in the recording of history in the early diplomatic history of China.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

interpreting history, interpreting in Ancient China, historical documentation in dialogues, early diplomatic exchanges in China, textual and linguistic analyses

Introduction

Unlike translation, which bears a written record, interpreting is relatively intangible. Research on interpreting and its history is therefore rare. This is somewhat ironic, since interpreters are always connected to history, politics and cross-cultural communication, and traces of interpreters or interpreting are constantly found in the historical records of a nation. Interpreters may be anonymous in history, but their presence as witnesses of history is well documented.

Apparently, the primary method for researching the history of interpreting is to study historical data. Whereas Western documentation of the history of interpreting is based on interpreters' work as cited in diplomatic activities, the evidence culled from Chinese history offers the speech used in the multilingual exchanges.¹ This historical evidence is consistently found in the form of direct quotations or dialogues, which were possibly the results of interpreters' work, and could provide a sound logical basis for concluding that interpreters were present in historical events and contributed to historical records.

Although these are worthwhile observations, the use of direct quotations, however, is not found exclusively in historical records detailing interpreting events. It is also found frequently in general historical records. Qian Zhongshu (1986) and Wu Huihua (1994) point out that the dialogues in Chinese historical records are the creative work of historians. They both agree that the insertion of dialogues in historical records enhances the readability and authenticity of the text. According to the *Book of Rites*, in China, two historians chaperoned the king on public occasions, one helps to record his activities and the other, his words. The historical record *Zuo Zhuan* pioneered the recording of actually spoken words in Chinese history. Li Zhouliang (2001) claims that *Zuo Zhuan* gives a historic narration through poetic and literary techniques. Another prominent Chinese historian, Sima Qian, was also well-known for his "creativity" in writing authentic and lively dialogues for historical figures with reference to their personalities, identities and contexts.

Despite the possible "literary intervention" of some historians in the Chinese tradition, the examination of historical texts concerning interpreting events where inter-lingual exchanges occurred does suggest the presence of interpreters in the diplomatic exchanges, the possible use of interpreters' notes in writing out a version of history, and possibly the role of interpreters as consultants to Chinese historians. Such a textual analysis will give us new perspectives on the history of interpreting in China, and the results might be highly relevant to the comparative examination of interpreting activities as developed historically in different cultures.

Literature Review

According to Franz Pöchhacker (2004), Edmond Cary pioneered in studying the history of interpreting in the mid-1950s. Cary's focus was on official translation and interpreting activities. More specifically, Alfred Hermann (2002) tried to trace interpreting work in Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome in the areas of internal central administration, military expeditions, religion and external diplomacy. Hermann gathered isolated documentation on the presence and inferior status of interpreters in the ancient histories of these countries. What he says about the ancient Egyptian's view of foreign races² as "wretched barbarians" and "inferior people" (2002: 15) is particularly noteworthy. He says,

The inscriptions, which record the speeches delivered when foreigners were received at court, are not their actual words, translated from their own languages. Rather, words were literally put in the mouths of the foreigners, words of entreaty for mercy, as thought out and put into stereotypical forms by the Egyptians. Thus, basically, any expression was always that of the Egyptians themselves. (Hermann 2002: 15-6)

Such a condescending attitude towards an alien race is similar to that of China in ancient times. The way in which alien speech was distorted to make it conform to the superiority complex of the host culture also finds expression in the records of interpreting events in Chinese history.

More recent pioneers in the area include Ingrid Kurz (1985), who documented the traces of interpreters in historical and classical texts; and Margareta Bowen et al. (1995) who labored through historical documents in different Western countries, to cite the presence and influence of interpreters. Bowen and his colleagues documented the development of interpreting from piecemeal records in ancient Greece and Egypt to the sophisticated profession of today by studying diplomatic archives, with special reference to a few prominent interpreters in Western history. As a seminal paper on interpreting history, their work spells out unresolved obstacles to this kind of research. As a political analyst, Ruth Roland (1999) adopted an interdisciplinary approach in order to explore the diplomatic roles of interpreters both East and West. She is one of the first Western researchers to have shown interest in Chinese interpreting history. The evidence put forward consists of personal diaries and anecdotes in histories, and they are not easily located or organized. Although the information presented in the aforementioned literature is somewhat fragmented and scattered, it does reflect the increasingly focused efforts of researchers. The interest generated amid hard work reveals the allure and obstacles in researching into the history of interpreting.

The history of interpreting in China has recently received much attention, with the publication of Ma Zuyi's (1998; 1999) works on Chinese translation history. Inevitably, interpreting, as the more primitive form of communication between speakers of different languages along the Chinese borders, is dealt with in an important chapter in one of his works. Ma's inclusion of the history of interpreting in his discussion also inspired Li Nanqiu (2002), whose work offers rich information about interpreting in China. The design of Li's publication is schematic and chronological in nature. Li discusses interpreting in relation to diplomacy, commerce, military, science-technology translation, literary translation and Buddhist scriptural translation. His materials are then profiled chronologically within each category. In fact, the presentation of his book is similar to that of a history textbook, and the way the author handles his materials is also history-based, rather than interpreting based. That is, the materials are not analyzed from the perspective of interpreting studies.

Li's claim that dialogues were typically used in historical records involving interpreters is supported by ample excerpts from various historical documents, though unfortunately most of them are not placed in the context of history, linguistic analysis, or cited sources. To examine the topic further, therefore, it is necessary that more historical records be located to examine the validity of Li's claim. This article aims at testing Li's claim and documenting the possible roles of interpreters as historians in recording Chinese history, in relation to their interaction with foreign envoys. Evidence will be drawn from primary Chinese historical sources, with close attention paid to the linguistic features used in these exchanges.

Interpreters as Historians

In ancient China, many small tribes and foreign states were found along its frontiers. Most tribes were either satellite or tributary states of imperial China. They would send official delegations to pay tribute and present gifts to the Chinese emperor from time to time. The foreign representatives were normally chaperoned by official Chinese interpreters throughout their visit, to ensure that Chinese etiquette was observed.

In the Chinese historiographical tradition, the standard histories (*zhengshi*)³ for each dynasty contain specific chapters (*liezhuan*) devoted to the biographies of prominent Chinese and foreign peoples of each age, as well as profiles of individual “barbaric tribes” and foreign kingdoms adjacent to China. With respect to the documentation of activities between China and foreign tribes, due to the communication barriers between language groups, interpreters were often utilized to help understanding. Interestingly, the exchanges between Chinese courts and foreign envoys were often recorded in the form of quotations and dialogues. In this article, relevant historical texts were examined in an attempt to identify consistent discourse features, if any, associated with texts depicting interpreters’ activities with foreign envoys.

Li Nanqiu (2002) reiterates that the use of dialogues to record the exchanges involving interpreters suggests the use of interpreters’ notes in the writing of historical records. For example, Li (2002: 29) asserts, after presenting a text regarding an interpreting event that includes dialogues, “there must be an interpreter around in the exchange between the emperor and the Turkish envoy. The foregoing dialogue should be the written record of the interpreting event.” In many parts of his work, Li (2002: 17, 18, 20, 22, 23) makes many similar remarks such as, “... the dialogues here are obviously written records of interpreters’ words.”

Unfortunately, Li did not pursue this claim further by exploring how and when the interpreters’ notes were incorporated into the historical records. Furthermore, who recorded the interpreters’ words or the exchange? It might be the interpreter himself, or the official historians accompanying the emperor. Due to the special nature of interpreting, it is likely that most interpreters dealing with foreign envoys would have to interpret on the spot, with or without notes. Back in ancient times, ink, brushes and paper or silk scrolls were used in writing. The need to grind an ink stick and use a writing brush were perhaps too much of a chore for note taking during interpreting, in the present day sense of the word. In addition, the so called “left and right historians” (*zuoshi* and *youshi*) possibly could not understand foreign languages. So they had no choice but to copy the renditions from interpreters.

It would be reasonable to assume, therefore, that relevant historical records were written with the help of interpreters through various possible means at the time. To take this assumption further, we can imagine four possibilities: first, interpreters were consulted so as to pin down details shortly after the inter-lingual exchanges; second, interpreters made a record of their work after the interpreting events (creating the interpreters’ notes, of course); third – a remote possibility though – interpreters made the historical records themselves, as part of their duties; and finally, since the Chinese emperor was habitually chaperoned in public functions by *zuoshi* and *youshi*, who were responsible for recording the emperor’s activities and speech respectively, these officials could have made reference to the interpreters’ renditions on the spot, or consulted the interpreters while compiling and finalizing their records afterwards.

in their court diaries (*qiju zhu*) or veritable records, which served as raw materials for the standard histories written usually in the dynasty to follow. After all, these officials were witnesses of the bilingual and multilingual exchanges and would be quite capable of giving an accurate rendition of historical events. Whatever the case may be, the interpreters' edge was their knowledge of foreign languages, and only interpreters could give an exact and accurate rendition of the exchanges. In this sense, the interpreters' role was very much like that of a historian.

Interpreting Events and Their Records in History

There are various kinds of historical records which contain traces of interpreting events and information on interpreters in China. While most diplomatic exchanges were recorded as if interpreters were invisible or left out, we can safely assume that interpreters must have been present to mediate between the Chinese and foreign people. More interestingly, interpreting events were featured in the dialogues or interpreters' quotations in historical records. Apparently, as shown in Example 1, the nature of interpreting events indicates that the exchange can most naturally, if not faithfully, be recorded in dialogue or direct speech.

Example 1

In the first year of Tang Suzong's (the emperor of China at the time) reign of *Qianyuan* (758 A.D.), a dynastic marriage was arranged between his younger daughter, *Ningguo* Princess,⁴ and the ruler of the Uighurs,⁵ Bilgä.⁶ The Emperor felt it wise to appease the Uighurs and therefore signed a peace treaty through this marriage alliance.

An imperial official escort, led by Suzong's nephew, Ju, accompanied the Princess to Bilgä. When the Emperor's envoy arrived at the military tent of Bilgä, Bilgä received him while seated in bed, imposing and dignified, wearing his robe and hat. The conversation which took place between Ju and Bilgä, most likely mediated by Bilgä's interpreter (see below for further linguistic evidence), was recorded in *Old History of the Tang* as follows:

Translation of Example 1

....., [the interpreter] ushered Ju to step outside of the tent and inquired: "May I ask what your relationship is to the Tang *Khan* (Emperor or the Son of Heaven)?"

Ju answered: "[I] am the nephew of the Son of Heaven."

Then [the interpreter] asked again: "Who is the one standing above you over there?"

Ju replied: "Assistant Commissioner Lei Lujun."

Bilgä bellowed with discontent: "The Assistant Commissioner is your subordinate. How dare [he] position himself higher than you?" Trembling with fear, Lei Lujun swiftly came down and stood in a lower position.

Seeing Ju standing there and not bowing in obeisance to him, Bilgä snapped: "In both our kingdoms, there are codes of customary obeisance for subjects. How could you not pay your respect to me?"

Ju replied: "The Son of Heaven arranged for his daughter to marry you because of your achievements. Usually in such cases in the past, the title of Princess was only conferred on daughters of imperial relatives. The *Ningguo* Princess, however, is the real daughter of the Tang Emperor. Beautiful and talented, she traveled thousands of miles to marry you. You are now the son-in-law of the Tang family⁸; [you] should know the

appropriate etiquette. How dare you sit in bed while receiving imperial edicts?" (Liu 945: 5200-01)

There is no mention of the presence of interpreter(s) in the document. We could, however, deduce that the one interrupting Ju's entrance to the tent must either be an associate of Bilgä, or his interpreter. The act of interrupting Ju's movement suggests that the interpreter, or an associate of Bilgä speaking through the interpreter, was not affiliated with the Chinese court. The interpreter was more likely to have been working for Bilgä. Since Chinese is not an inflectional language, the subject of a sentence does not have to be present in a sentence when the speaker believes it should be understood from the linguistic context. For example, all the subjects omitted in the Chinese original text have been inserted (placed within parentheses) in the translated text above in order to facilitate English readers' comprehension. Notwithstanding that the identity of the interpreter is not definitively established, the linguistic evidence in the exchange does indicate that an interpreter from Bilgä's side was used. The use of two different terms in referring to the Tang emperor, namely, "Tang emperor" or "Son of the Heaven" and "Tang *Khan*" in the source text, suggests that there might have been two interpreters in the exchange, one from Bilgä, and the other from the Chinese court. Only foreign tributary or satellite states would address the Tang emperor as "Tang *Khan*," as in "May I ask what your relationship is to the Tang *Khan*?" The interpreter from the Chinese court would have to observe the Chinese conventions by addressing the ruler of Tang as "*Tianzi* [Son of Heaven]," as seen in this example.

The different terms of address indicate the presence of two interpreters in the interpreting event. The fact that the exchange was recorded in direct speech may be related to the way the Chinese interpreter reconstructed the event, either in his mind, or in his notes. Apparently, these records denote the presence of interpreters in diplomatic exchanges, and the likelihood that interpreters' notes were used to prepare the final historical record.

Example 2

Textual references in some Chinese historical records show how an interpreting exchange was documented. Example 2 reveals a unique situation in which the foreign tongue was recorded in direct speech, whereas the Chinese tongue was recorded as either paraphrase, or summary, or just plain description. From the perspective of the Chinese court, since the foreign language could only be understood through interpreting, it was important to keep the content recorded as closely and faithfully as possible to the original. This may well explain why the words of foreign envoys were recorded in direct quotations in Example 2.

Translation of Example 2

Lun Misa, an envoy from *Tubo*,⁹ paid a visit to the Tang court with his retinue to sue for peace in 702 A.D. The empress Wu¹⁰ had a banquet arranged for them in the *Linde* Hall (the Hall of Maternal Virtues) where a live variety show was to be performed on stage. Lun Misa said to the empress: "*Chen* [I]¹¹ was born in a remote and uncultivated region, and have never known anything about Chinese music. May I have your permission to watch the show?" The empress Wu yielded to his plea. Lun Misa and his retinue then watched the show.

Delighted by the show, Lun Misa respectfully thanked the empress: “Ever since we tendered allegiance to the grand Tang, *chen* [we] have been treated with great kindness. [We] have now even had the chance to watch an extraordinary music show, the likes of which [we] have never seen before. As insignificant individuals, how could [we] ever express our gratitude to your imperial heavenly grace? From the bottom of my humble heart,¹² [I] wish the empress Wu a long life of ten thousand years.”

In the following year, a *Tubo* envoy visited the Tang to propose a marriage alliance to the Tang imperial family, with gifts including one thousand horses and two thousand *liang*¹³ of gold. The empress Wu granted their wish. (Liu 945: 5226)

In Example 2, Lun Misa’s words were put down with great precision twice, both times as direct quotations, whereas the empress Wu’s responses were recorded in a straightforward summary on three different occasions in the source text. This contrast is worth noting because it seems to make more sense for Chinese official historical records to give more space to the empress Wu’s words in detail, rather than the other way around, especially since it is the Tibetan envoy that is involved. For Tibet had not only been regarded as “barbarian” throughout China’s imperial history, but it had also just been defeated by Tang China (Liu 945: 5225-6). The situation is far more complex than it appears to be, and it deserves further exploration in another article. Although there is no textual evidence documenting the involvement and identity of interpreters, it is nonetheless only logical that the interpreter’s actual words during the bilingual exchange might have served as the source of this part of the historical record. The example again strongly supports the argument that the interpreter’s mediating role can somehow be traced in the historical record.

Example 3

Example 3 narrates an encounter between the Song emperor and a tributary envoy from the southwestern borderlands. It is significant because the text provides specific references to the presence and identity of the interpreter.

Translation of Example 3

In the first year of Taizong’s reign of *Zhidao* (995 A.D.), as instructed by his king Long Hanxiao, the envoy Long Guangjin led tribal barbarians in the *Zangge* region¹⁴ at the southwestern Chinese border to offer their local products as tribute to the Song court. Taizong summoned them to court and made enquiries about their geographical location and local customs.

In reply, the interpreter said: “It would take forty-five days if one goes there by land from the *Yi* prefecture. The soil is suitable for growing all sorts of grains. Non-glutinous rice is mainly planted there. Deer and river deer are hunted with wooden arrows for food. In each prefecture there are two to three hundred families, governed by a prefect. There is no death penalty for murder. The release of a monk or nun to the laity can be arranged through the payment of a ransom. The king lives in a place protected by inner and outer walls, but there are no ramparts for military defense. And, there are only low walls at officials’ residences.” (Tuo 1345: 14225)

As in Example 2, the words of the Chinese court in Example 3 were recorded in summary form as well, while the interpreter’s words were recorded at length in direct quotations. Besides, the fact that the emperor summoned the envoy (who is not the interpreter) and that the reply was given by an interpreter are explicitly stated in

“*Taizong zhaojian qishi, xunyi dili fengsu, yi duiyue*” [literally “Taizong summoned them to court and made enquiries about their geographical location and local customs. In reply, the interpreter said...”]. As to the identity of the interpreter, the mere reference to “In reply, the interpreter said” does not really give us any clues. The content of his speech, however, suggests that the translation is placed in the context of a comparison with Chinese customs of the time.¹⁵ This suggests that the interpreter must have been familiar with Chinese customs. However, he used an incorrect term for a geographical division in his translation. *Zhou* (there are around 2500 households per *zhou* in ancient China) is used for a much smaller administrative unit consisting of 200 to 300 households. For if the interpreter were Chinese, it would make more sense to have the word *zhou* translated as *xian* [county] instead. Therefore, it is most likely that the interpreter was a foreigner who came with the envoy, not one working for the Chinese court.

Example 4

Example 4 highlights Chinese official procedures by which foreign envoys were summoned to meet the emperor. Before the summons was dispatched, the envoy's letter from his state would first have to be translated by the Chinese court and presented to the emperor. Also, quite consistently in the records concerning interpreting events in Chinese history, the emperor's enquiries directed at the envoys were all documented in summaries or indirect speech. It was only the replies from the envoys (through an interpreter) that were documented as direct quotations.

Translation of Example 4

In the fourth year of Shenzong's reign of *Yuanfeng* (1081 A.D.), General Ah Xin from Khotan presented the letter from his state to the Song emperor, which was entitled in Chinese as “From the humble *Heihan* King of Khotan who is fortunate, powerful, and knowledgeable in languages, to the great official and maternal uncle of the *Han* family who is from the big world in the East where the sun rises.” Basically, the letter said that, although there was a great distance between the two kingdoms, Khotan greatly admired the Song; and that three times in the past they had sent envoys with tributes to the Song, but these envoys still had not returned. The letter went on at great length regarding this matter.

[Chinese official] Dong Zhan arranged General Ah Xin and his retinue to *Xi* prefecture, and had the letter translated into Chinese [again] so that it could be understood. The emperor issued an edict to summon the past three Khotan envoys to the Song court, and bestowed upon them generous gifts to carry back. They were then sent back to Khotan. The emperor also proclaimed that these envoys were to be given Chinese official titles. [During the meeting,] Emperor Song Shenzong enquired how long they had been away, which kingdoms they had passed through, and whether they had been attacked or robbed in their journey.

They replied: “[We] have been away from Khotan for four years, and [we] are halfway through our journey. [We] have passed through the lands of Uighur and Qingtang¹⁶ city. It was in Khitan's region that [we] were worried that [we] might be attacked and robbed.” (Tuo 1345: 14109)

It should be noted that the Khotan translator or the King himself (the latter a relatively remote possibility, though) translated the heading of the letter into Chinese first and then submitted it to the Chinese official. Because it was poorly translated, as

shown in the improper use of the term of address for the Chinese emperor and in the juxtaposition of words – which makes no grammatical sense in the Khotan's original Chinese translation – it certainly was not presentable to the Emperor. So Dong Zhan had it translated again by Chinese translators.¹⁷

In line with the linguistic pattern displayed in Examples 2 and 3, Example 4 again shows the use of direct quotations for words/statements uttered by the foreign envoys, whereas indirect reporting was often reserved for words from the Chinese court. Such consistency itself may carry some significance, and one cannot help but wonder who would be behind the use of this rhetorical convention. If interpreters' notes were referred to in the compilation of relevant historical records, it seems that editorial decisions were made in favor of incorporating interpreters' notes in the standard histories of China.

Conclusions

Li Nanqiu's work was the impetus for the present article. His claim that interpreters' words were put down in writing and formed part of historical records was both stimulating and intriguing. The process of exploring and testing Li's claim by textual and linguistic analyses gives rise to exciting observations regarding historical descriptions of interpreting events. The examination of these historical texts certainly suggests the presence of interpreters in diplomatic exchanges. However, it must be noted that the "linguistic" presence of interpreters is not equally conspicuous in all the texts examined; it is more obvious in some than in others. Linguistic analysis proves to be a useful tool in studying these historical texts. Some examples analyzed in this article even provide linguistic clues pertaining to the identities and affiliations of interpreters.

Li is probably right in claiming that interpreters' words might well have been used as part of historical records. His claim, however, could be further refined by identifying possible ways in which interpreters' words relate to the historical recording of inter-lingual encounters. In this article, different scenarios are put forward concerning how interpreters contributed to the making of historical records. These include: interpreters being consulted for details after the inter-lingual exchanges, interpreters' notes being used as a reference, and historians' references to interpreters' renditions on the spot. Whatever the case, interpreters were closely associated with the creation of these historical records. They were either approached for details of the exchange they engaged in, or directly quoted by historians in order to give more accurate documentation for China's encounters with foreign envoys. No doubt, interpreters either actively or passively provided linguistic information to be used when recording these historical encounters. It is therefore possible that interpreters' notes were used to produce a version of history, and interpreters acted as consultants to Chinese historians at some points.

Most importantly, the textual and linguistic analyses of four texts drawn from different periods in Chinese history also confirms that the words of foreign envoys were interpreted in great detail and found in direct quotations, while words from the Chinese court were summarized in the description or narration. Apparently, the interpreters' words were selectively used in the historical record. From the viewpoint of a host culture, a detailed record of the words of foreign envoys seemed more

important since interpreters were the only ones who could understand the foreign tongue. The more elaborate quotations from foreign envoys may also show us how interpreters or historians reconstructed the exchange in their minds or in their notes, given that greater caution would be taken in recording utterances made in foreign and unfamiliar tongues. The present attempt to research into China's interpreting history has taken Li's claim further and has trod on a path different from those taken in the West. The availability of textual records concerning interpreting events in ancient China makes textual analyses a worthwhile research method in exploring the interpreting history of China. The observations made in this project also point to the need for research on the problem of the asymmetry of power in interpreting, which has yet to be studied. It is clear from this study that such an endeavor holds forth much promise.

NOTES

- * This research has benefited from financial support (DA04A7) from the Research and Postgraduate Studies Committee of Lingnan University, Hong Kong, China.
- 1. For example, in a historical record of the interaction between China and her southeastern satellite state *Yueshang* (today's Vietnam), the *Yueshang* envoy spoke to the emperor through relay interpreters with three different languages (the source text can be found in Appendix):
The three interpreters worked relay translations from *Yueshang* kingdom to the Chou court. [The envoy said through interpreters:] "The road to China from our country is long and difficult. Since we do not understand each other's language, I rely much on the relay interpreters to pay tribute to you." (Fan 445: 2835)
- 2. Because both the borderline of China and the status of non-Chinese peoples have undergone changes over dynasties, the notion of "foreign" in this article is used to encompass both "non-Han Chinese minorities," such as Tibetans [*Tubo* people in Tang and Song dynasties] or Muslims in today's *Xinjiang* province, and foreigners in the modern sense, such as Vietnamese [*Yueshang* people in Chou Dynasty].
- 3. The "standard histories" (*zhengshi*) refers to "legitimate dynastic succession histories." The two other terms sometimes encountered are "official histories" (*guanxiu shishu*), or "dynastic histories" (Wilkinson 2000: 501).
- 4. The Tang Emperor issued an edict bestowing honor upon his younger daughter as "*Ningguo* Princess" (Princess of the Peaceful Kingdom) before she left China to travel to the "barbarian" land.
- 5. During the few decades under the reign of Suzong's father Xuanzong, the Uighurs, the eastern Turkish pastoral nomads, remained friendly with the Tang. The Uighurs established regular tribute relations, and their envoys traveled regularly to the Tang court. After An Lushan's rebellion in 756 A.D., the Tang's longest and the most brilliant reign came to an end.
- 6. *Bilgā* is *P'i-chia Khan* in the Chinese source.
- 7. For the Chinese source texts, please see the Appendix at the end of this article.
- 8. Tang family (*Tangjia*) has been deleted in the *New History of the Tang* (*Xin Tangshu*), because the term is a colloquialism used during Tang times (Chen 1989: 218).
- 9. *Tubo*, the Tibetan kingdom in Tang Dynasty, is also romanized in English as *T'ufan*. For example, see *Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part I, The Cambridge History of China*, v3., ed., Denis Twitchett. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- 10. The empress Wu usurped the throne and ruled for 20 years after her husband's death in 684 A.D.
- 11. "*Chen*" as the subject of the sentence here is used by statesmen to refer to themselves when addressing the Emperor or Empress. This word indicates that the envoy of *Tubo* in the western borderlands of China accepted Tang China as its superior.
- 12. "*Ququ*" as the subject of the sentence literally means small and unimportant, which is a self-deprecatory phrase for "I."
- 13. In the Tang dynasty, 3 *liang* = 1 *daliang* (the standard ounce); and 16 *daliang* = 1 *jin* (approximately 1.5 English lb.). Therefore, 2000 *liang* of gold is approximately 62.5 lb. of gold. See "Table 5. T'ang weights and measures" (Twitchett 1979: xx).
- 14. The *Zangge* region comprises part of modern *Guizhou* and adjacent provinces in southwestern China.

15. When Taizong asked about Tibetan customs, the interpreter specifically focused on the differences between Chinese customs and those of Tibet, such as the law for murders, the rules for a monk or nun to return to the laity, and the architectural characteristics of the ruler's and the officials' residences.
16. According to the *History of the Song*, *Qingtang* city should be *Xining* city in present-day *Qinghai* (Tuo 1345: 2168).
17. The flow of Example 4 appears to present a bit of a problem in its source text. Perhaps, because for Chinese historians how the tribute system worked was common knowledge, they did not bother to write a comprehensive record about it. It was as follows: The ideal vehicle for a relationship with tribes or states was the tribute system. Foreign rulers were required to send tributary envoys periodically to the Chinese emperor. When the envoys reached the Chinese border, Chinese officials immediately took charge and accompanied them to the capital. The Chinese officials were also responsible for coaching them on the proper etiquette to follow in court. After they had been properly advised, they had an audience with the emperor. Then the rituals had to be performed by the envoys. They had to kowtow to the emperor, symbolically acknowledging their status as envoys of "vassal" states or tribes. Their conduct implied that their rulers were subordinate to the emperor. Once they had concluded this ritual, the emperor would summon them closer to the throne for a brief conversation. They then offered their tribute of local products to him, and he, in return, bestowed valuable gifts upon them and their rulers. After the audience had ended, the envoys would stay in China to trade with Chinese merchants. (Rossabi 1983: 2)

REFERENCES

- BOWEN, M., D. BOWEN, F. KAUFMANN and I. KURZ (1995): "Interpreters and the Making of History," in DELISLE, Jean and WOODSWORTH, Judith, eds., *Translators through History*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, p. 245-73.
- CHEN, Y. (1989): *Chen Yinke dushu zhaji (Jiu Tangshu, Xin Tangshu zhibu)* [Random Notes by Chen Yinke on Reading *Jiu Tangshu* and *Xin Tangshu*], Shanghai, Shanghai guji chubanshe.
- FAN, Y. (445, rpt., 1965): "Nanman xinanyi liezhuan" [Memoir of the Southwestern Barbarians], in *Hou Hanshu* [History of the Later Han], Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, p. 2835.
- HERMANN, A. (2002): "Interpreting in Antiquity," in Pöchhacker, Franz and Shlesinger, Miriam, eds., *The Interpreting Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, p. 15-22.
- KURZ, I. (1985): "The Rock Tombs of the Princes of Elephantine: Earliest References to Interpretation in Pharaonic Egypt," *Babel* 31-4, p. 213-218.
- LI, N. (2002): *Zhongguo kouyishi* [A Chinese History of Interpreting], Qingdao, Qingdao Press.
- LI, Z. (2001): "Qian Zhongshu guanyu shizhuan wenxue lilun de ruogan chanshi" [Qian Zhongshu's Studies on Some Theoretical Issues of Biographies in Chinese Historical Works], in *Qiushi xuekan* [Pursuing Truth], 28-4, p. 88-90.
- LIU, X. (945, rpt., 1975): *Jiu Tangshu* [Old History of the Tang], Beijing, Zhonghua shuju.
- MA, Z. (1998): *Zhongguo fanyi jianshi* [A Concise History of Translation in China], Beijing, Zhongguo duiwai fanyi chubanshe.
- MA, Z. (1999): *Zhongguo fanyishi* [A History of Translation in China], part one, Hankou, Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe.
- PÖCHHACKER, F. (2004): *Introducing Interpreting Studies*, London, Routledge.
- PÖCHHACKER, F. and M. SHLESINGER (2002): *The Interpreting Studies Reader*, London, Routledge.
- QIAN, Z. (1986): *Guanzhui pian* [Thoughts on Reading Chinese Classics], Beijing, Zhonghua shuju.
- ROLAND, R. (1999): *Interpreters as Diplomats*, Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press.
- ROSSABI, M. (1983): "Introduction," in *China among Equals*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, p. 1-13.
- TUO, T. (1345, rpt., 1977): *Songshi* [History of the Song], Beijing, Zhonghua shuju.
- TWITCHETT, D. (1979): *Sui and T'ang China, 589-906, Part I, The Cambridge History of China*, ed., v3., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- WILKINSON, E. (2000): *Chinese History: A Manual*, Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series 52, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

WU, H. (1994): "Zuozhuan waijiao ciling tanxi [A Study of the Diplomatic Discourse in Zuozhuan], *Zhongguo renmin daxue xuebao* [Journal of China's People University], no. 4, p. 87-93.

APPENDIX

Chinese Source Texts

Example 1

(Liu 945 in *zhonghua* edition: 5200-01)

....., 引瑀立於帳外，謂瑀曰：「王是天可汗何親？」瑀曰：「是唐天子堂弟。」又問：「於王上立者爲誰？」瑀曰：「中使雷盧俊。」可汗又報曰：「中使是奴，何得向郎君上立？」雷盧俊竦懼，跳身向下立定。瑀不拜而立，可汗報曰：「兩國主君臣有禮，何得不拜？」瑀曰：「唐天子以可汗有功，故將女嫁與可汗結姻好。比者中國與外蕃親，皆宗室子女，名爲公主。今寧國公主，天子真女，又有才貌，萬里嫁與可汗。可汗是唐家天子女婿，合有禮數，豈得坐於榻上受詔命耶！」 (Liu 945 in *zhonghua* edition: 5200-01)

Example 2

(Liu 945 in *zhonghua* edition: 5226)

吐蕃遣使論彌薩等入朝請求和，則天宴之於麟德殿，奏百戲於殿庭。論彌薩曰：「臣生於邊荒，由來不識中國音樂，乞放臣親觀。」則天許之。於是論彌薩等相視笑忤拜謝曰：「臣自歸投聖朝，前後禮數優渥，又得親觀奇樂，一生所未見。自顧微瑣，何以仰答天恩，區區褊心，唯願大家萬歲。」明年，又遣使獻馬千匹、金二千兩以求婚，則天許之。(Liu 945 in *zhonghua* edition: 5226)

Example 3

(Tuo 1345 in *zhonghua* edition: 14225)

至道元年，其王龍漢^遼遣其使龍光進率西南牂牁諸蠻來貢方物。太宗召見其使，詢以地裏風俗，譯對曰：「地去宜州陸行四十五日。土宜五穀，多種^粳稻，以木弩射^麋鹿充食。每三二百戶爲一州，州有長。殺人者不償死，出家財以贖。國王居有城郭，無壁壘，官府惟短垣。」 (Tuo 1345 in *zhonghua* edition: 14225)

Example 4

(Tuo 1345 in *zhonghua* edition: 14109)

Quotation in Note no. (FanYe 445 in *zhonghua* edition: 2835)

四年，遣部領阿辛上表稱「于闐國優儺有福力量知文法黑汗王，書與東方日出處大世界田地主漢家阿舅大官家」，大略云路遠傾心相向，前三遣使入貢未回，重複數百言。董氈使導至熙州，譯其辭以聞。詔前三輩使人皆已朝見，錫賚遣發，賜敕書諭之。神宗嘗問其使去國歲月，所經何國及有無鈔略。對曰：「去國四年，道塗居其半，歷黃頭回紇、青唐，惟懼契丹鈔略耳。」 (Tuo 1345 in *zhonghua* edition: 14109)

Quotation in Note no. 1

越裳以三象重譯而獻白雉，曰：“道路悠遠，山川阻深，音使不通，故重譯而朝。” (FanYe 445 in *zhonghua* edition: 2835)